

Kitchen Hearth

Susan Alt is at the helm of Kitchen Hearth catering the very finest quality "Homemade Food To Go" to customers in the Madison area for the past seventeen years. All their food is made the old-fashioned way--from scratch with the highest quality ingredients.



Kitchen Hearth started out in a small kitchen/retail store on Madison's far west side with a mission statement to meet the needs of busy people who don't have time to prepare their own food but still prefer quality homemade food for themselves, their family and friends. Their goal is for customers to view Kitchen Hearth as an extension of their own kitchen. That mission statement still holds true today.

During the early years of Kitchen Hearth's growth, the Small Business Administration was there to provide financial assistance to this new business venture.

In the early 1990's, Kitchen Hearth expanded into catering services for corporate customers and special family events. In 1995, a second retail store was opened in downtown Madison where homemade food is prepared to go for breakfast and lunch customers. In 1999, the original west side store was closed to accommodate the need for more production space. **Kitchen Hearth expanded to a 4800 square foot kitchen/bakery production site located at 2207 Industrial Drive in Madison.**

Even though annual sales have now surpassed the two million mark, Kitchen Hearth still prepares food from scratch. The business currently employs thirty full-time and nine part-time employees with Susan's son, Mike Adix, holding the position of Catering Sales and Large Accounts Manager for the past four years.

Since September 2000, Kitchen Hearth has operated the cafeteria at the Trek Bicycle Corporation in Waterloo, WI. This successful experience of providing homemade food for an in-house corporate cafeteria encouraged Kitchen Hearth to seek more opportunities in this new market. As a result, in June of 2003, Covance Laboratories where they provide three full meals seven days a week to the research participants was added to their contract client list.

Since the beginning, Kitchen Hearth has been active in the community by donating homemade food products to multiple Dane County entities. They target three categories to receive their contributions: medical related, community services and education. Their primary recipient is the Breast Cancer Recovery Foundation where they donate food for multiple fund-raising activities and provide delivery, staff service, and equipment rental free of charge for events throughout the year. The Aids Network Red Ribbon Dinner event is another event where a Kitchen Hearth employee donates on-site chef service serving Kitchen Hearth donated food.

Kitchen Hearth's owner, Susan, regularly volunteers her time as a guest speaker for various education/business classes. She has presented topics of entrepreneurship, business plan writing, and customer service at the Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corp., U.W. Madison School of Business and the Small Business Development Center. She also serves as a LEAP Advisory Board member to a local small business.

Kitchen Hearth strives to create a harmonious working environment where employees work independently in their specific areas of responsibility as well as a team member with other employees. This non-authoritarian management practice fosters an employee's sense of pride and work ownership resulting in 2004 sales growth of twenty-eight percent.

Kitchen Hearth looks forward to continued growth in 2005. Their plans include expanding the downtown store hours to serve the growing market of downtown condominium owners looking for more dinner-hour options and possibilities for another contract arrangement for corporate cafeteria service. They will continue to reach out to expand their market share of corporate catering. Most important, they plan to continue to provide quality food and service to their many loyal customers.

It appears that Kitchen Hearth has the right stuff that is evidenced by the quality service they offer their community, their continued growth, and continued contributions to the community. The SBA is privileged to have been a part in the success of this thriving business.

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